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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God and God alone, we praise You that You give power to the weak, and to those who have no might You increase their strength. Increase the stamina of our lawmakers when their hearts are overwhelmed by challenges.

May they look to You, the fountain of every blessing, to enable them to solve our national problems with wisdom and faithfulness. May they not be afraid or dismayed, always placing their trust in You. Lord, inspire them to remember that Your plans stand firm, as Your purposes prevail through all generations. Instruct them in the way they should go as You give them Your peace.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PAUL). The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF RACHEL BRAND

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday the Senate voted to confirm Jeffrey Rosen as the Deputy Secretary of Transportation. In a couple of hours, we will take a cloture vote to advance another well-qualified nominee, Rachel

Brand, to serve as the Associate Attorney General.

Rachel Brand's impressive background includes experience clerking for Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, and she has already been confirmed by the Senate twice before. She is "extraordinarily talented," as Chairman GRASSLEY noted at her hearing, and "dedicated to the full and evenhanded enforcement of our laws."

Ms. Brand also has the support of a bipartisan group of former senior officials at the Justice Department, including Jamie Gorelick and Seth Waxman, who, in a recent letter on her behalf, cited her "stellar reputation for . . . integrity, legal skills, and respect for the law."

As they pointed out, Ms. Brand's extensive private and public sector experience would serve her well as the Associate Attorney General. They also noted she would be a "trusted leader in the Department." I look forward to advancing her nomination later this morning.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, as I outlined last week, during the Obama years, the American people struggled with an economy that failed to meet its potential. It had the slowest recovery since World War II, the middle class losing its historic status as the majority in our country, too many out of a job and looking for work, too many giving up after years of fruitless searching, too many fortunate just to have a paycheck but not one large enough to keep pace with ever-rising health costs and energy bills. This is the Obama legacy on the economy.

Over 8 long years of failed leftwing policies on everything from regulations to taxes, a Democratic administration put on a virtual clinic in how not to get an economy moving again. No wonder the American people opted for a pro-growth direction in November.

Ever since, this Republican Congress has been working to get our economy moving again and spur job creation. Rather than bury our economy in an avalanche of redtape, like the last administration, it is time for a new direction on regulations—smarter and pro-growth. Already, we have taken action to kick-start those efforts, like passing important legislation to provide relief from Obama-era midnight regulations.

Rather than make our Tax Code more complex like the last administration, we think it is time for a new direction on taxes—simpler and pro-jobs. Passing tax reform legislation would mark a major achievement in bringing us closer to that goal. This Republican Congress and this administration made it a priority from the very start. Over the years, many of our Democratic friends have also expressed the view that we need tax reform.

For years, it has been clear that we should help American workers by reforming our outdated and convoluted tax system, which currently discourages investment here in America and deters companies from growing, creating jobs, and increasing wages.

For years, it has been clear that we should remove a huge drag on job creation by reforming our overly complex and punitive tax system, which currently undercuts employers that want to expand with new investments, jobs, wages, and employee benefits.

For years, it has been clear we should make taxes simpler and lower for both businesses and individuals; that we should strive for a tax code that works for American families and for American businesses, rather than working against them. This year, we finally have the perfect opportunity to achieve that goal. Rather than engage in blind opposition for its own sake on yet another issue, I hope Democrats will instead take the kind of constructive approach we saw the last time our country enacted comprehensive tax reform. Back then, both parties recognized the

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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need to address the burden and growing complexity of our Tax Code, and they came together to actually do something about it. Republicans and Democrats worked side by side and across the aisle to move that tax legislation. It was a big win for both parties, for Ronald Reagan and the Republicans, for Tip O'Neill and the Democrats.

Now it is once again time we do something about the issue, and I would hope our Democratic colleagues will once again work on a bipartisan basis toward that end. This has been a growing problem for a number of years now. The American people deserve a tax system that allows them to keep more of their hard-earned money, that empowers them to invest in their futures, and actually makes it easier to succeed rather than harder.

We have to get this accomplished because Americans have waited long enough for an economy that finally lives up to its potential and finally allows them to realize theirs as well.

I appreciate the House under Speaker RYAN's leadership for the role it is playing in these efforts. That work continues now with a Ways and Means Committee hearing dedicated to tax reform tomorrow and more to follow in coming days.

I also appreciate the good work of Members in both the House and the Senate, particularly the Senate Finance Committee under Chairman HATCH, who has been leading our discussions. For years, the chairman has been hard at work with fellow Finance Committee members on both sides of the aisle on options for tax reform, and I am confident Senator HATCH will continue to lead the way on these efforts in the days and months ahead.

The task before us is certainly a significant one, but I am confident we are up to the challenge because we know how important it is for us to get this done, and we know how long overdue this is as well.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Brand nomination, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Rachel L. Brand, of Iowa, to be Associate Attorney General.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided in the usual form.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS FOR SENATOR TILLIS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just heard that our friend and colleague from North Carolina has collapsed during a race in DC and is receiving medical attention. Until we hear further news, our hearts will be in our mouths, hoping for the best. Our thoughts and prayers, as a Senate family, are with the junior Senator from North Carolina and his family.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. President, on a different subject, the events of the last 2 weeks have shaken my confidence in this administration's competence and credibility. There has been revelation after revelation, allegation after allegation of misconduct on the part of the President and his team. In the past 2 days, it has reached new heights.

The President, according to reports in the Washington Post and the New York Times, may have divulged classified information to a known adversary and actively tried to quash an investigation of a close political ally.

From the President's own words, we already know that the Russia investigation was on his mind when he fired Mr. Comey. We now know it may not have been the first time the President has taken an action to impede an active investigation of his campaign or associates, if the reports in the New York Times are true.

Concerns about our national security, the rule of law, the independence of our Nation's highest law enforcement agencies are mounting in this land. The stated explanations for these events from the White House have been porous, shifting, and all too often contradictory.

The country is being tested in unprecedented ways. What is now required are the facts and impartial investigations into these very serious matters. The White House should make available to the Intelligence Committees the transcripts and any related summaries of the Oval Office meeting between President Trump and the Russian Foreign Minister and Ambassador. We can then assess exactly what was said and understand the consequences of any intelligence that was shared with the Russians.

On the topic of Mr. Comey, if the President has tapes of his conversation with Mr. Comey, we ought to be able to review those tapes as well to see if the President pressured the FBI Director to shut down an active investigation. The Times reported that Mr. Comey kept contemporaneous memos of his conversation with the President, and Mr. Comey has a reputation for accuracy in those memos. Those memos should also be provided to the congressional Intelligence and Judiciary Com-

mittees, and Mr. Comey should testify before those committees in public. Indeed, providing the Congress the tapes and memos may be the only way for this administration to credibly make a case to a justifiably skeptical American public about its version of the story reported by the New York Times. The President says what Comey said was wrong. Prove it. It is easy to prove it, as long as there are tapes or transcripts of what happened. If the President is right, he will have no problem releasing memos, tapes, or transcripts that corroborate his story. But if he fails to release them, the American public will justifiably tend to side with Mr. Comey, not what the President had to say, particularly in light of so much backtracking, backsliding, and factual fabrication in this White House.

Finally, the events of this past week only heighten the need for a special prosecutor who is truly independent to run the Department of Justice's investigation into potential collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. The American people must have faith in the integrity and impartiality of this investigation. We have learned, if the reporting is accurate, that the President is willing to directly interfere with an active investigation. Whether or not it breaks the law is not the point here. The point is, he was trying to interfere with an investigation. How can anyone trust someone in the President's chain of command, someone who the President has appointed, after those actions? The only way out is a special prosecutor. It is the right thing to do.

We know the President is willing to fire an FBI Director because of this investigation, in his own words. It makes all the sense in the world to have a special prosecutor who can be fired only for cause to lead the Russia investigation. That would help protect the integrity of the investigation by insulating it from a White House, which at the very minimum, is overreaching.

Given the circumstances, these requests are reasonable. They are modest. I hope—I really pray—that my friends on the other side of the aisle will see that now is the time to put party considerations aside and do what is right for our country. I know that several of my colleagues—Senators from Maine, Tennessee, Arizona—have expressed concerns. A few have gone further and endorsed some of the actions I have mentioned. It is a good first step, but it is not enough. In the past 24 hours, there has been more movement among Republicans in the House than here in the Senate. The Senate, by its traditions, should be leading this effort, not following. More of my Republican friends should join the Senators from Maine, Tennessee, and Arizona in speaking out about these events first but, far more importantly, helping us get to the bottom of them in an impartial, trusted, and respected way.

To my friends on the other side of the aisle: America needs you; America